



Transportation Decisionmaking: Information Tools for Tribal Governments

Developing A Long Range Transportation Plan

The purpose of transportation planning is to identify broad goals to meet transportation needs. The multimodal strategies for achieving these goals should address current and future community land use, economic development, traffic demand, public safety, health, and social needs among others.

By developing a Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), tribes will gain experience with process-related practices that can be applied as “good planning” and appreciation of linkage between Tribal transportation planning and other planning activities.

Several federal requirements call for a LRTP. Most tribes are familiar with this requirement in the Indian Reservation Roads (IRR) Program Final Rule (IRR Rule 25 CFR 170.410-415). Additional requirements for LRTPs are in the FHWA/FTA statute and regulation on Statewide and metropolitan planning (23 USC 134 and 135; and 23 CFR/49 CFR 450.214 and 450.322).

Public Involvement/Consultation with Planning Partners

The IRR Rule and the FHWA/FTA statewide and metropolitan planning process specify requirements related to public involvement.

Public involvement is an opportunity to capture the Tribal community's values and perceived needs; establish consensus; and identify issues and concerns. Public involvement is perhaps the single most important component of transportation planning.

Separate and equally important to the public involvement process is consultation with planning partners. There are consultation requirements specified in the Statewide, metropolitan and IRR statute and regulation. Consultation between planning partners is an opportunity to confer on needs of the larger community, to compare and coordinate planning approaches, and generally to communicate about the mutual vision for the transportation system that often will cross over multiple jurisdictions.

Step 1: Establish Policy, Goals, and Objectives

At this stage the tribe is setting the overall goals for how their transportation system should be designed, built, operated and maintained over the next 20 years.

Goals should be specific enough to guide the development of the plan but at the same time flexible enough to respond to changing conditions and implementation priorities.

Policy statements are often developed as a result of goals. No tribe will have the same priorities, and therefore each tribe may have different goals and objectives. Nevertheless, goals and objectives are developed in a consultative manner, include public involvement, are measurable and are used to guide plan development.

Step 2: Analyze Transportation System Conditions

To determine what future investments to make, tribes should evaluate the existing conditions. There are a variety of tools/techniques available to do this. Factors to consider include:

- o Defining the geographic limits of the transportation system.
- o Defining information needed about the overall system and the different elements of the system.
- o Assessing which conditions are most important for the area's economic and social well-being.
- o Determining who will use the information and why.
- o Defining which measures of system conditions will be used.
- o Maximizing existing tools and data.

Step 3: Perform Needs Analysis

Transportation system requirements should be evaluated by comparing the goals and objectives for the transportation system with the existing baseline system conditions. The needs analysis addresses the gap between current conditions and the future. How much can be implemented over the planning horizon will depend in large part on finance levels. A successful needs analysis should:

- o Provide technical information for goal setting.
- o Define the costs of meeting plan goals and objectives.
- o Compare transportation plan needs with available funds.
- o Provide information to evaluate trade-offs between different needs.

Step 4: Set Priorities

Since transportation needs typically outweigh expected revenues, it is important to prioritize the needs identified during the transportation planning process. Some key success factors for setting priorities are:

- o Establish formal prioritization criteria.
- o Apply the same criteria to all programs and projects.
- o Attempt to use the same criteria used in the development of the statewide plan.
- o Consider as many factors as possible in determining program priorities.

Step 5: Establish a Funding Plan

A financial analysis of the specific projects that implement the transportation plan will help to ensure that it is realistic. Without tying transportation projects to reliable funding sources, the recommended solutions that are developed can easily become a “wish list.”

The funding plan should be a multi-year financing plan based on identified needs. It should also include an analysis of the participating tribe’s capabilities for financing such needs. If probable funding falls short of meeting identified needs, the funding plan should contain a discussion of how additional funding will be raised or how assumptions will be reassessed to ensure that level of service standards will be met or adjusted.

Step 6: Develop the Plan

Developing the plan document or “putting it all together” can be a difficult process if not approached in a systematic fashion. Key success factors for developing plans include:

- o Having clearly established roles and responsibilities for who will develop the plan, how and when it will be adopted, and how and when the plan can be amended.
- o Using the planning team and the public consultation process to help develop the outline for the plan.
- o Ensuring that the plan is a strategic and visionary document and not a “wish list”.

After all the evaluation, analysis and public involvement, a recommendation is made to the Tribal Council. As decisionmakers for the Tribe, Tribal Council members may want further information or may choose a different alternative than exactly what is presented by staff. With the technical analysis and information presentation, the Council can make an informed decision.

Step 7: Develop the Program

Programming refers to a series of activities carried out by planners, including data assessment, appraisal of identified planning needs, and consideration of available or anticipated fiscal resources to result in the development, scheduling, and planning of a list of identified transportation improvements.

The programming of projects for funding should consider timing of the need for improvements and timing for fund availability.

Often, plans will require more funds than are available from federal, state, and local sources traditionally dedicated to transportation funding. The agencies engaged in planning should identify funding mechanisms to support implementation of the transportation plan or reassess their desired levels of service.

Step 8: Implement and Monitor the Plan

For a plan to be successful it must be implemented effectively. Transportation planning includes continually monitoring the performance of the transportation system and ensuring that plans are being implemented to meet the intended objectives. Success factors for implementation and monitoring of the transportation plan include:

- o Developing an ongoing process for monitoring progress toward plan objectives.
- o Establishing a decisionmaking process.
- o Establishing a process for tracking conditions.
- o Establishing a well-defined process for how priorities will be set.

The LRTP under the IRR Program needs to be reviewed annually and updated every five years as per 25 CFR 170.414.

Conclusion

Transportation planning provides a framework for the community to make decisions about its transportation system. The LRTP is a tool for tribal members as well as the tribal decisionmakers. As you set out to develop the LRTP for your tribe, remember that the process does not need to be complex to be successful. There is no set length of pages. Through a focused set of tribal meetings, your tribe can develop a transportation plan that is suited to meet the unique needs of your tribe and can be developed with a minimal budget.

Additional Resources

Transportation Planning Capacity Building Web site:

<http://www.planning.dot.gov/tribal.asp>

FHWA Native American Coordination:

<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/hep/tribaltrans/index.htm>

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